

Daily Eagle

ROUND THE KITCHEN FIRE.

When I get up o' mornin's fer to light the kitchen fire, An' watch the boys creepin' up the chimney higher an' higher, An' an' an' a cracklin' with exhilaration roar, A sendin' out the warmness o' far across the parlor floor, An' I turn around to toast my back an' rub my horny hands, An' see the sparks a flashin' back from mother's shiny pants, My feelin's goes to warblin' like a blue-bird on a spire, When I get up o' mornin's fer to light the kitchen fire.

An' then the room gets good an' warm, the kitchen starts to hum, An' mother potters down the stairs an' stands an' yawns awhile, An' says: "Now, Pap, you go an' rouse them sleepy boys o' yours, For it's a-wakin' an' there's nothin' to do besides the mornin' chores." An' then she breathes up the hearth with that old turkey wing, An' stoops an' looks her stockin' up on ties 'em with a string, An' Tower says an' stretches out, an' acts a little shy, When I get up o' mornin's fer to light the kitchen fire.

An' then the boys come trampin' in an' scrouge around an' spit, An' kick the dog an' poke the fire an' set down on the cat, The coffee-pots a-biled over an' the biscuit steamin' hot, The sassafras just brown enough, the breakfast table set, An' mother says: "Fetch up the cheers," an' pours the coffee out, My cup runs over with a joy the rest don't know about, For the blessin' o' the Lord to me's a daily drawin' alight, When I get up o' mornin's fer to light the kitchen fire.

—E. S. Hopkins, in Louisville Courier-Journal.

JACK PRICE.

Only a Dock Hand, but He Gave His Life for Others.

I suppose not one in a thousand will care to read a dock hand's story. People call us coarse and vulgar. Granted, but our work makes us so. There is no finer, I fancy, who will shudder at the thought of such a story, and gentlemen who will dip into it carefully, expecting to find a string of oaths. Judge for yourselves whether this tale of Jack Price, my partner, is a fit for refined ears.

No need to tell you of a dock hand's life. A man that beats about in the cold and rain, handling sleazy ropes or balancing himself on the gunwale of a coal barge with twenty feet of swift water under him, he is not apt to be a pretty, kid-gloved, soft-voiced fellow. If his face is red it is because midwinter winds on the Ohio are not good for the complexion. He deals with rough work and is rough himself; but his heart is just as apt to be right as that of a Senator or a Judge.

We started from Pittsburgh on the George Hammond in July, Jack and I. There was a big river, and we made good time to Louisville, where we shipped on the Charley Roberts, bound for Orleans. To say we found it hot on the Lower Mississippi gives no idea of the weather. Half the crew were unfit for duty. One morning there was a whisper among the boys, "What's up, Jack?" said I.

"Steve Robinson's down with swamp fever." The boys gathered in a knot around the captain. Before long there was a panic among them. The mate shook his head and looked thoughtful.

"The man must be put ashore," said the captain. "No, sir!" cried Jack Price. "Who are you?"

"Plain Jack Price, but Steve don't go ashore. It's an outrage to think of it."

"Who's to nurse him?" "Me!" "Do you know what swamp fever is?" "Do I know any thing!"

"I'll nurse Steve, I tell you! We've made five trips together, and if he's put ashore here in the swamps I go with him."

"You it is," said the captain, turning on his heel. "Not another man goes into Steve's state-room."

For ten days Steve's room was quarantined. Nobody but Jack went inside of it. We saw him sometimes, carrying something to the sick man or sitting on the guards to get a breath of air; but every soul on the boat kept out of his way. We all liked Jack, not the fever might be in his clothes. He began to look pale, but he never grumbled. One day the mate came out to us that Steve was dead. A few hours after we buried him on an island in the river in a pine box, and the only thing like a prayer said over him was from Jack: "God help him!"

The fever did not spread, and we all breathed free. A few days later, Steve's death I was on watch at the head of the tow, and Jack was with me. We were puffing at tobies to keep off the mosquitoes. There was a haze over the water, but the stars were shining, and the broad river was quiet as a lake.

"Jack," said I, "I've got a raging headache."

"No!" said he, as if he asked a question. He took my hand and held it.

"Not fever, is it, Jack?" "Come and lie down," was his answer.

A dizziness came over me, and without Jack's arm to steady me, I would never have reached my bunk. I remember very little after that. I learned afterwards that I was delirious; but how long I can't tell you. I remember Jack's face near me at times as in a dream—the kindest face you ever saw, not looking at me, but at a face with some of God's goodness in it.

When I got back to reality again I found Jack bending over me. I was in the same state-room, and I could feel from the motion that the boat was under way.

"How long have I been here, Jack?" "Quite awhile, my boy."

"And where are we?" "Not far from Memphis."

"Going up or down?" "Going home. Don't talk if it tires you."

"What was the matter with me, Jack?" "A touch of fever; but you're better now."

"Can't I look out, Jack? It will do me good to see the sun."

He raised me up as gently as a woman would have done, and I looked out through the glass door of the state-room eagerly as a child. Had the sun ever shone so brightly before? The low wooded shores looked like paradise. No mountain stream ever seemed so beautiful to me as the great muddy river.

"Jack," said I, when he laid me down again, "what can I ever do for you?"

"Pay me for what I'm this as a ghost. I must have been sick a long time. You've pulled me through, Jack."

"I've done nothing of the kind," said he, laughing.

I noticed for the first time how very thin and pinched his face was. It seemed as if he had grown old.

"Look at me, Jack; you've been the best friend I ever had."

He made no answer, but took my hand and pressed it. It seemed as if a mist came between us, and I saw big tears standing in Jack's kindly eyes.

"I thought I'd got past this," said he, coughing.

Next day he came in smiling, with a letter and some oranges.

"I went ashore at Memphis," he explained, "and found a letter from Sister Annie. They're looking for me home."

"Well, soon be in Pennsylvania again, Jack."

He looked me full in the face and smiled. His eyes seemed very large and his cheeks were bloodless. It saddened me to look at him.

"I must go now," said he. "I hope you'll enjoy the oranges." I was mending fast and expected to be out very soon. Jack did not come again that day. Next morning the cook brought me a cup of tea.

"Where is Jack?" I asked. "Busy." "I thought of him all day, but he did not come."

"Cook," said I, at last, "I want you to tell me the truth about Jack." "Don't you fret!" he answered. "But I must know."

"Well, he's not able to be about." "Where is he?" "In No. 8. But you can't go near him; he's got the fever! Delirious! Wouldn't know his own mother!"

"Who's nursing him?" "I am—what little he gets. We can't make a hospital out of the Charley Roberts."

Cook tried to stop me, but I staggered across the cabin into No. 8. I could hardly recognize Jack as he lay on the bunk, his face so flushed and his eyes so bloodshot. He had dropped down, too weak to take his clothes off. I took his hand and sat beside him.

"Jack, my boy, what's wrong?" "Nothing, Sam."

Jack never said much. He was better at doing than saying. I looked at the poor fellow in despair. I had never nursed a sick person in my life. The captain came in and I sat there.

"We must have a doctor, captain," said I. "Might as well want a gold mine," he replied. "But look at Jack, captain. What can we do?"

"I don't know." "Sam," said Jack, looking at me with a strange expression, "you know my sister Annie?"

"Certainly, Jack." "I want you to tell her about me." "You will soon see her, Jack."

"No, Sam, I'm going." "We're both going home." "Yes, going home. I'm tired! Tired!" "Then rest, Jack. I shall be here."

"Take my hand, Sam." "I have your hand, my boy. Try to sleep."

"Yes," he went on, pointing, "there's Annie at the door. She looks more and more like mother as she grows older. She's glad to see me from the way she smiles."

"Indeed she is, Jack." "That's Sam's voice; he got over the fever well. I believe I had it, too. Hear old Point barking at the gate; he's most as glad as Annie to see me back. Ah, Sam, it's good to be back in Pennsylvania—God's country! Annie! Annie!"

He fell back in a stupor, with his eyes set. I felt a spasm pass through his frame, after which his hand lay in mine like a lifeless thing. I looked up questioningly at the captain.

"God help him! He is dead."

"Oh, surely not!" "Dead!" he repeated. "Only when I bent over him did I believe it. Jack was dead."

"He died working for others," said the captain, and in his hot words these words stood for his epitaph.

I can only tell Jack's story in a plain way. I can not fill your eyes with tears as mine are filled, as there is no art behind my words. You read of good men—unselfish and heroic men that poets sing of and historians immortalize—but here there was one that nobody ever heard of. Who was there to read a funeral sermon over him in a lonely place on the river bank next day? Who prayed over the rough pine box? Not a prayer, not a hymn, not a funeral, only some tears that came of genuine grief.

We left him there on the river bank with a piece of driftwood to mark his grave, while the next flood would sweep away. I found a little flower growing there—a violet, I think, which I thought was for Annie.

Jack was as homely a man as ever you saw, a big, raw-boned fellow, with a twinkle of the eye that made one laugh. Had you been hunting for a man of polish and education you would not have picked him out. His head had not been cultivated at the expense of his heart. He used to sing in a grange sometimes when a rope got tangled or the pumps worked hard or the coffee didn't suit him. I am not trying to picture him as perfect; I want you to know him as he was. His voice in a sick room was as gentle as a child's; he had a big, tender heart, kind to the very last.

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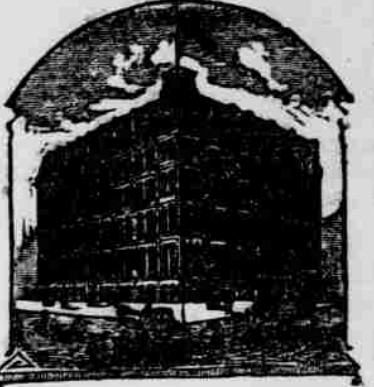
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